

Change Management in the Third Sector

Foundations of Management: Change Management in the Third Sector

When Nadia Inwood attended Mitchell Phoenix' public Foundations of Management programme in 2009 she wanted to gain the leadership skills required to navigate a difficult period of organisational change. But how well would a general management course usually populated by executives from the world of banking, insurance, and commerce transfer to the challenges faced by someone working in the charity sector?

What was your management background?

Before I worked for Victim Support I was a manager in retail, but that was a completely different environment. In terms of charity experience, when I started the Foundations course I had spent about three months managing a team of three staff and twenty volunteers. Then, just as I was starting the programme, I took over the management of a much larger area with twelve staff, a different dynamic, and a lot more to do in terms of partnership work.

What are the differences between managing in retail and in a charity?

In retail the manager is quite isolated; your focus is on managing the staff you have in your shop, and hitting the sales targets you have for that period. In the third sector the manager spends a lot of time managing the relationship with partner organisations, and a great deal of their focus is on generating funding from those partners. The influence the manager can exercise on these people is really important. There is also a different staff-management dynamic in charities, and performance is measured differently. We have targets here relating to funders' expectations, but that is quite different to field sales where you are looking at what you've got coming in every day.

How is performance measured in a charity?

In a number of ways. We gather service user feedback on what we are achieving with clients and how they perceive the service. We also have targets relating to fundraising; securing the funding to keep projects going is particularly difficult at the moment, and so being able to do so is a key measure of performance. As an organisation one of our aims is to create positive change for victims and witnesses, some of our performance measures relate to how well we influence other organisations on these issues. You can probably hear from these that it's important for us to be influential outside our organisation as well as with our staff and volunteers.

What are the challenges in managing volunteers?

Volunteers are the backbone of the organisation. There are about 11,000 people at Victim Support, and 9,000 of them are volunteers. They deliver the service and we are lucky to have them. Our volunteers come from all areas of society, some are young people who are studying, others are people who are out of work. All sorts of people volunteer for us and this means they have a wide range of different needs to cater for.

The difference between managing a member of staff and a volunteer is this: a staff member has obligations as part of their role, contractual agreements, appraisal, and targets to work to in their personal development. With a volunteer it's very much about what they want to get out of that role. They are not doing it for money but for fulfilment of another kind, a sense of giving something back to society, of helping people, or whatever it may be. This means we have to balance working towards good practice, ensuring they follow professional policies and procedures, and at the same time not making their role so onerous that they are no longer prepared to do it. We have to maintain and harness their enthusiasm.

Volunteers are giving their time away for free and they are passionate about what they are doing. We need to give them something back for what they are giving us, and that means having the support and learning opportunities in place for them. You need to put the time in at evenings and weekends doing positive things for the volunteers - setting up training opportunities and activities. Organising these out of hours activities demands a high level of commitment from the paid members of staff, and I enjoy working with people who are committed in this way.

What did you want from the Foundations programme?

Victim Support is going through wholesale changes at the moment, so I was looking to gain confidence in my ability to lead change and communicate strongly. Before the course I was a supportive, positive manager with a lot of knowledge and experience. The next step was to be able to be decisive and communicate those decisions straight to the point. In the past I'd skirt around the decision, give someone the background, soften them, and I learned on the course that if you do that people see you as weak. Now I have a structure for communicating directly and effectively and persuading people to take action.

For example, a particular project was in deficit, so I had to take some tough decisions, one of which was that the volunteers should pay towards their own supervision. (Typically volunteers in Victim Support counsel others who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. A supervision is a one to one meeting where a volunteer works through the emotional impact counselling others with serious problems is having on their *own* lives.) Obviously volunteers are giving their time for free, so this idea of them paying for supervision wasn't well received. It was important that I communicated the decision strongly, helped them see the benefits in the long run, and secured their continuing commitment to this course of action.

The other area I wanted to improve was delegation. I was about to go from having three staff to having twelve. In the past I was someone who worried about asking people to do things in case it was too much for them, so I used to just do the task myself. Now I am confident to delegate, and I'm able to get them to buy in to doing the task as well. With more staff and responsibility, it was crucial I improved on this, and the course has been very helpful in this area.

How easy did you find it to apply the material from the programme back in the office?

I felt really positive about it after the first seminar, but I was a bit worried about whether I could put the material into practice and make it work in the office. The concepts were clear and I could see they would create results, but I wondered if I would be skilful enough in applying them. Although I was apprehensive, I knew I had to put the material into practice, because we had to report our results to the group at the start of each seminar. So I tried it, saw that it worked, and then saw the evidence that these things were working for the others in the group too. As the course went on the messages were repeated, we saw the concepts working in everyone's management environment and it started to sink in and become everyday practice. We all quickly developed the confidence to go out and experiment with our management style.

What were your early successes in applying the material?

I had to put together a proposal for the police to fund 3 years' work tackling Domestic Violence (DV). Before the course I would have written the proposal on my own. This time I consulted with the DV team manager, and asked her a number of questions. The manager, seeing how I was working with her, then got her team together and asked *them* a number of questions about what we should be doing and the best way to set it up. Then the team manager and I got the team together and shaped the proposal. The feedback from the team was that they had enjoyed the process and were looking forward to the changes in their way of working that the suggestions in the proposal implied. They were more motivated and confident than they had been before, and this was in the context of changing the way they were working. Usually people resist change, and one of the concerns I had before the course was how to involve and motivate the team in all of the changes that were going on in the organisation. On this occasion the task of writing a proposal had become a motivating exercise.

Another aspect of the course material which was important was all the work on building influence. I had come in as the new borough manager, and I had to build relationships with a number of key contacts quickly – the police, the local authority, other partner organisations. Part of my role was to chair the domestic violence steering group, sit in on meetings with other partners, and secure our funding streams for the coming year. I knew that they might be worried about the stability of my borough because the old manager had left and they didn't have a relationship with me yet. If I didn't come across as a strong leader who knew what she was doing, they might decide not to continue funding some of our projects, and to divert the money to a different organisation. I was very conscious of all the material we covered early in the course on influence in meetings, being prepared, communicating confidently, listening to others.

A success I was happy about was getting some funding for a particular project. It didn't come through a normal application, but through a discussion with one of our key partners. They had some money left and I managed to persuade them to give it to us, and

as a result it kept the project alive for a bit longer. I obviously had a strong influence on them, and they saw my ability and the logic of what I was suggesting for developments with the project. I hadn't done any fundraising before, so I felt really pleased.

Now the programme has finished it's possible to look back. What do you still use, what has remained with you?

All of it. I feel like I'm using the material more now I've finished – it's become part of my style. Whenever I'm in a meeting I'm always thinking about what I should be doing, the same with appraising staff. The "Check up to Praise" idea has such a positive impact – especially when staff morale has been low because of all the changes going on. The approach to delegating has been excellent – getting staff buy in, hearing their suggestions, and it has been great for maintaining staff motivation.

There's a lot in the programme. It was the right course at the right time and it's given me confidence, a strong foundation, and something to fall back on – to know I've got specific things I can do in my approach that work.

What for the future? What's next for you and Victim Support?

Having done the course, and with the experience I've accumulated, I realise I'm a good manager and I enjoy the challenges management brings. Victim Support is undergoing considerable change at the moment, and change is always difficult. That said, it's a great organisation, and a very positive place to work. I enjoy working in an environment where people are passionate and committed to what they do, and that's the environment we have here.

Victim Support is a national charity which effects positive change for victims and witnesses, helping people to reduce the impact of crime and recover and rebuild their lives. For more information visit www.victimsupport.org.uk



London

Mitchell Phoenix Limited
Parkshot House
5 Kew Road
Richmond
Surrey
TW9 2PR
UK

+44 (0) 1 372 272 858

New York

Mitchell Phoenix LLC
410 Park Avenue, 15th Floor
New York
New York 10022
USA

+1 917 402 2020

w - www.mitchellphoenix.com

e - enquiries@mitchellphoenix.com